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AUTHOR Metz, Joseph
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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses itself to advisor selection, training, and the evaluation of advising at the College Park campus of the University of Maryland. Selection of student advisors for the Summer Orientation Program and those in the General Undergraduate Advisement Office is described, and suggested criteria for selection are noted. A series of practical recommendations regarding training, and a description of on- and off-campus training programs follow. Annual campus-wide surveys show the students to be satisfied with advising, but information about individual advisors has not yet been sought. The author presents a set of guidelines for evaluation. (KS)

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ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT: PERSONNEL AND PREPARATION

Dr. Joseph Metz

It would be a pleasure to come here today and speak only of achievements, that is, of systematic planning systematically realized. What I actually will speak about will be a conglomerate of things that our campus has wished for, has planned for, has tried to do, has avoided doing, and, in some cases, has actually done. The net result for you, I hope, will be a recognizable feeling about how we, as campus professionals, grapple with the continuing problem of academic advisement.

In March of 1972, our Campus Senate Committee on Academic Advising issued what has become for some of us at College Park a near landmark report on advisement. Instead of voicing collective laments about the sorry state of that, then rubber-stamp, function and instead of aggrieved fingerpointing, it officially acknowledged (1) that advising involves life-planning as well as information-giving; (2) that the total campus commitment to "good" advising must involve personpower and money and rewards and visible lines of responsibility, not ritualistic statements of concern in the campus newspaper and catalogs; (3) that the quality of the advising system, not a requirement to be advised, should attract advisee to advisor--required advising, therefore, was officially abolished; (4) that the buck for selecting, training, and evaluating advisors should stop in a single, clearly designated office--namely, that of our moderator; and (5) that advisors could come in many forms other than faculty and staff, some of these to include students and computers.

CG 010971

As with all good reports, this one enjoyed wide distribution and limited attention. Immediately, however, it relieved advisors from the inane practice of having to approve thousands of illegible schedule cards and students from having to obtain an equally illegible advisor's signature. The Report's long-range effectiveness has been in providing the force of the Campus Senate for moving persons, places, and

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things hitherto little interested in the function, let alone improvement, of academic advisement.

With that Report as historical backdrop and administrative lever, I'd like to discuss three areas in which efforts have been made to bring advising alive at College Park: advisor selection, advisor training, and the evaluation of advising.

SELECTION:

Our selection process varies in quality according to the particular group of advisors being chosen. (As you have heard, As you will hear) the persons selected for the Summer Orientation Program are the most finely screened. The final product, one of thirty selected, has typically survived an applicant/advisor ratio of 10-to-1, has obtained more than a few letters of recommendation, has been through a systematic series of group and individual interviews, and has had a full semester's training in everything from personal assertiveness to pre-med requirements. Typically selected for only summer employment, these persons are actively sought by other academic units to serve as peer advisors, evaluators, administrative assistants, etc. All of them are undergraduates.

Advisors in the General Undergraduate Advisement Office, the administrative and advisement home for "Undecided" students, go through a less extensive interview process and have a shorter period of training. Yet they develop into some of the most knowledgeable and certainly some of the most active advisors on campus. They have the preliminary administrative authority to deal with all kinds of academic transactions; they do life-planning with returning adults as well as new freshmen; they are involved in a variety of campus programs. Most of them are graduate students.

These two examples serve to illustrate the point that students, properly selected

and trained, do make a significant contribution to a campus advising program. At College Park, in addition to these programs, we have students serving as regular departmental advisors--earning academic credit for that experience--and a group of minority students serving as advisors for other minority students. And all of the above ignores our student run, student planned, and student funded "S.T.A.R. Center" which provides academic assistance and information to students.

It is, unfortunately, at the faculty/staff level that our selection process finds persons assuming an advising role with little or no screening having been done. The "Thou shalt!" of the department chairperson is incentive enough for taking on the role. And even though Dr. Shoenberg is specifically designated as having authority to appoint advisors, we have devised no instrument with which to evaluate a faculty member's interest in, enthusiasm or capacity for, advising. Even given such an instrument, the selection of enough advisors for 23,000 undergraduates in five divisions, nine colleges and schools, and innumerable departments would consume almost the full-time efforts of a skilled psychometrist and practiced interviewer, let alone those of an academic dean! For the time being--and for other reasons mentioned below under "Evaluation"--we have let the "Thou shalt" approach suffice.

Perhaps our major difficulty in selection is not knowing which attributes/skills/characteristics make an advisor "good". Certainly most of you must remember having a professional mentor whose interpersonal-communication skills were skillfully hidden from public view. But you went back for more because he/she knew how to get you through the system. Or what about the nice person who listened well and gently reassued you that graduate school admission, not being all that competitive, could certainly be achieved with a 2.3 undergraduate average! Is it knowledge or

style or both or neither that we need to look for?

To answer my own question with my own biases, I would suggest that

(1) we select only those persons who express a willingness to serve as an advisor--where this effectively wipes out all faculty and staff selections in an academic unit, that unit should be required to furnish professional and/or peer advisors for its students;

(2) we select only that person who regularly has both space and time available for advising--I have no magic minimum for either to propose but would suggest that the advisee feel some sense of personal privacy in the location and feel no sense of "let's-hurry-up-and-get-this-thing-done" in the conversation;

(3) we select persons who can and will commit themselves to participation in advisor training programs;

(4) we select persons without regard for hierarchical position within the institution (assuming conditions 1., 2., and 3., above, already are met)--deans and chairpersons and classified staff and freshmen should be allowed to be selected;

(5) we select persons from all academic disciplines where advising is to be done in a cross- or non-disciplinary setting--concern for student development appears in an array of physical and intellectual forms;

(6) we select persons who are emotionally capable of hearing--this is obviously the most difficult attribute to identify and I leave you to your own favorite instruments and screening devices.

After these selection criteria are met, I propose that the advisor behavior desired be moulded from training, actual experience, and systematic evaluation.

TRAINING:

In the area of advisor training, we have been more active, more persistent, and, I think, more successful than with selection. Because of our limited time here, I will only briefly mention some of our more illustrious programs.

Off-campus retreats: any campus advisor - any advisor, up to a limit of thirty-five, was invited to attend a three-day workshop on advising, the primary emphasis being improvement of interpersonal communication. An out-of-state site was chosen to provide no more than necessary telephone contact with campus concerns. Two members of the campus counseling center were workshop leaders. Cost per participant was minimal, with accommodations and meals being arranged on a group basis. Ample recreation time was allowed.

Evaluations from the first of these workshops were stimulatingly supportive. Participants reported that just another voice at the other end of the telephone was now attached to a recognizable face and body. Role-playing sessions encouraged a sharing of advising styles. People started to hear.

Our second workshop of the same kind, held with the same interpersonal intentions, was less cohesive in its effect, racial issues and confrontations sharply dividing the participants.

Our third attempt was cancelled, presumably for lack of interest in the interpersonal content.

On-campus workshops - we have offered several varieties of these for different groups of participants:

Interpersonal Communication Skills Workshop - this was a followup program, for less affluent academic units, to our first off-campus retreat described above. General response, as among off-campus participants, was enthusiastic and supportive.

Workshop for TA's in Chemistry - an advising workshop for teaching assistants in the Dept. of Chemistry was offered as a one-day adjunct to that depart-

ment's own week-long training program. Coordinated with the Executive Committee of the academic Division, with the department chairman, and with those faculty and graduate students offering the training, this program emphasized "mental health" aspects of TAs' relationships with undergraduate students and with other TAs. Interpersonal communication, emotional health, and referral resources were part of the agenda. Evaluations from the nearly 100 participating teaching assistants were generally positive. We are now trying to determine the actual usability of the program's material with a follow-up evaluation.

Workshop for Advisors in the College of Education - Tom Grites designed and offered a one-day workshop for faculty advisors in the College of Education. Morning sessions were devoted to a review of campus academic policy and practice; afternoon sessions to developing better communication skills. Highly positive evaluations from participants were obtained each time this workshop was offered.

Training programs, involving academic credit, for peer advisors -

Summer Orientation Advisors - as Denny Roberts (has pointed out, will point out), students selected to be Orientation Advisors are required to participate in a semester-long training program for which the student received academic credit.

Departmental Peer Advising Programs - students who serve as regular departmental advisors may also earn academic credit through a program now centrally coordinated by our office. The student, once invited to advise in his/her major department, schedules a two-credit course for each of two consecutive semesters. This one-year commitment is required to promote continuity in both the student's training and advising. Although much of the actual training is on-the-job, within the department,

students must attend periodic training sessions over the year, these devoted to discussions of various academic policies and practices. At the end of the year, participating students submit to the program coordinator a log of actvities written to reflect descriptive and evaluative perceptions of their advising experiences.

Minority Advisement Program - the Minority Advisement Program, developed by the Office of Minority Student Education, has a training program for students selected to work primarily, but not exclusively, with minority students. As with the Orientation program, training sessions for this group extend over one academic semester. Academic credit is awarded.

From the work of the many persons who plan and effectuate these training programs, I have culled several working observations which might, in this context, be passed on as "guidelines." You are free to decide their value for your own campus situation:

(1) Off-campus retreats are delightful respites from the immediate pressures of campus but are expensive and time-consuming in terms of preparation and participation. Faculty and staff members seem to prefer short, viz., one day or less, on-campus, conveniently-located training sessions. Coffee and donuts, free lunch, and release from regular duties, not necessarily in that order, are additional enticements for participation.

(2) Faculty and staff members seem to prefer training programs which emphasize the "nitty-gritty" of day-to-day advising. This is to say that discussions of things philosophical or theoretical have, on our campus, been more resisted than relished.

(3) Students seem to be amenable to a wider range of advising and advisor-training experiences. Through direct participation in the academic system of the institution they often are already familiar with its complexities. As a

result, students seem to resonate more than faculty and staff to improvement of interpersonal skills, discussion of theoretical bases for advising, and other "head stuff."

(4) Academic credit can be an effective reinforcer for students in advising- and advisor-training-programs. Within the college/university environment it seems to legitimize their participation in the system in the two senses of (1) wages for work done and (2) establishing credibility among those campus traditionalists who doggedly contend that most good learning experiences are further ennobled by earned credit.

(5) For the benefit of all involved, training programs need to be administratively sanctioned at the highest possible level. The dean who opens or, even better, attends your training program makes a significant contribution to its eventual success.

EVALUATION:

It often appears that the hackles of contemporary academicians are up more over the systematic evaluation of their professional performance than over continuing budget reductions. As for most of us, it is uncomfortable to be in the "fishbowl." Certified as competent in our specialty areas, we resist the implied or actual necessity for refurbishing our professional image.

Imagine then the plight of the typical campus advisor who involuntarily serves in the advisor role, who has little or no preparation for advising, who has little administrative connection with the academic system about which he/she advises, who views most advisees as impediments to the fulfillment of other professional commitments, and who enjoys no substantial reward for advising. Now, we say, that her/his performance in this role is to be evaluated!

This introductory portrait highlights, I believe, the major areas of consternation and concern among advisors on the topic of evaluation:

First, as I have said above, most faculty and staff persons become advisors through conscription, not personal choice. "Why, then," he or she asks, "should I be evaluated for doing this thing which I would prefer not to do in the first place?"

Involuntarily into the system, our typical advisor is now confronted by layers of administrative overhead. Provosts, deans; associates and assistants; directors and chairpersons--all present a maze of bureaucratic responses and referrals which must be used to get things done for advisor and advisee. On which variables do we then evaluate our reluctant advisor, when often and ultimately the advisee's fate is determined by someone else in some other part of the pecking order?

And to this perplexing question I need only quickly add (1) "What's the payoff for effective advising?" and (2) "How much time remains for effective advising once classroom teaching, research, writing and publication, community service, consultation, continuing professionalization and, of course, commencement attendance are parceled out of the academic year?"

At College Park, these questions remain virtually unanswered, although not unexamined. Our Senate Adjunct Committee on Academic Advising developed, during the 1972-73 academic year, a position paper on "Rewards and Recognitions for Academic Advising." It suggested, among other things that

> the quality and quantity of a faculty member's advising could be considered as a factor in promotion to a higher academic rank. This would in effect place advising on a par with effective teaching, research, and publications.

For the majority of departments on our campus, no such placement has occurred!

Our most visible success in evaluation has been with annual campus-wide surveys. As this convention is in progress, 25,000 copies of an advising questionnaire are being distributed along with pre-registration materials at College Park. This, the third of our annual surveys, will provide us with information about why students see an advisor, why they don't, how they feel about the information and attention they receive, and how, generally, they feel about the program of advisement at our

campus.

Results from earlier surveys showed us getting a "good" rating on a five-point scale with "good" as midpoint. Since students' expressions of satisfaction with advising are heard about as frequently as compliments about dining hall food, we were pleased with the collective evaluation.

Unfortunately, the campus-wide approach gives feedback only about individual academic units--from division to department--not about individual advisors. Which apple might be spoiling the barrel is still undetermined. We have much work left to do!

If I may be permitted one last set of guidelines disguised as workaday perceptions, then I would note that

(1) no meaningful evaluation of advising can occur until we know why we select certain persons to advise and until we can explicate, for those unversed in professional jargon, the intent and substance of our training programs--in short, you can't pass judgement on what you don't know you're looking for!

(2) evaluation must somehow take into account the expectations with which the advisee approaches the advisor, not only isolated advisor behavior;

(3) evaluation should recognize the long-range impact of advisor assistance and information--today's apparent gem may prove to be tomorrow's obvious oversight;

(4) evaluation and its outcomes can be used to improve selection and training procedures--whom we choose and how we prepare those chosen may be at the heart of students' expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with our advising programs. And when this statement sounds as truistic to your administration, and to your faculty and staff, and to your students as it sounds to us now, you will be well on your way to improved advisement.

Many thanks for your attention!